



Photo by: Maslowski / NWTF

Today in Virginia, and around the Philpott area, the wild turkey flourishes and hunters enjoy seasons in the Spring, Fall and Winter. Many animals prey on the eggs of turkeys and on young chicks. Skunks, snakes, crows, opossums, raccoons, coyotes, foxes, and some small rodents will search for a meal of a turkey egg or chick. Bobcats, foxes, owls, red-tailed hawks, and coyotes will kill adult turkeys. Turkeys use their acute vision and speed to avoid becoming a meal. They also make a distress call, called a putt, to alert the flocks of impending danger. When the flock hears another turkey putt, they immediately become alert, looking for danger and quickly move away.



## Ten Fast Facts About the Turkey

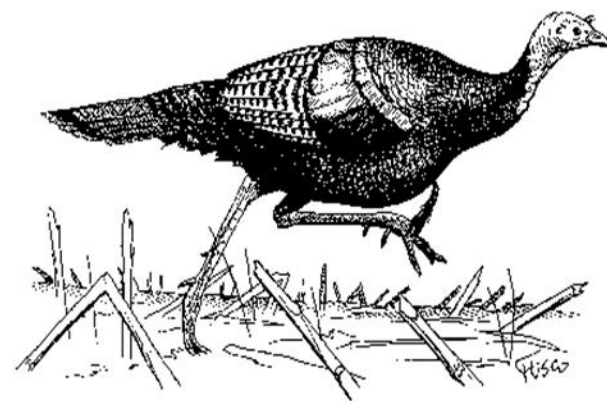
1. In addition to the Eastern Wild Turkey, four other species of turkey are in the U.S.
2. Turkeys are very vocal, social birds making more than 2 dozen different calls.
3. Wild turkeys can run 25 miles per hour and fly 55 miles per hour.
4. Wild turkeys are totally native to N. Amer.
5. Domestic turkeys originated from wild turkeys captured in Mexico and taken back to Europe by explorers in the 1500's.
6. The Eastern Wild Turkey's Latin name, *Mellangris gallopavo silvestres*, means "forest" turkey.
7. A wild turkey may range over several square miles in a single day.
8. The largest wild turkey weighed 37 lbs.
9. A juvenile male turkey is called a "jake".
10. Benjamin Franklin proposed that the wild turkey be our national symbol instead of the bald eagle.

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# Eastern Wild Turkey

## Philpott Lake





The Eastern Wild Turkey is located, in abundance, in the Philpott Lake area. It is a large majestic bird. Males are known as “toms” or “gobblers”. The male turkey is of dark coloration and has a brightly colored, un-feathered, head of red, blue or white. Gobblers have spurs on their powerful legs which may grow up to 1 1/2 inches long. The spurs are used to fight other gobblers for dominance during the mating season. Mature male turkeys also have a special mass of bristly, hair-like feathers, known as a beard, growing from the front of their breast. The beard may reach a length of 12 inches. Males also have a fleshy growth, a wattle, that hangs beneath its chin and a snood that grows above its bill. The female turkey, or hen, is lighter in color than the male and lacks spurs. A very small percentage of hens will have a beard. In the sunlight, the turkey’s five to six thousand feathers exhibit a metallic glow, known as iridescence, with beautiful shades of red, green, copper, gold and bronze. Adult gobblers usually weigh between 16 and 24 pounds, while the hens average 8 to 10 pounds.

Hens usually lay from 10 to 12 eggs during a two week period.



A newly hatched flock will be ready to leave the nest within 24 hours to feed. The gobblers provide no parental care to the new flocks. The chicks follow the hen which feeds them for a few days. The chicks quickly learn to feed themselves, eating insects, berries, and seeds. Adults will eat anything from acorns and berries to insects and small reptiles. Turkeys are known as opportunistic feeders, meaning that they eat whatever is available.



Although turkeys frequently feed in open fields, they live mostly in the woods. They need large timber to provide a stable food source and to provide safe roosting sites above the ground. They especially like the various species of oak trees found around Philpott.

Early settlers to the New World hunted game, including the turkey, for meat. Due to lack of methods to preserve food, hunting was done year round. The vast forests which were home to turkeys and other game rapidly were cut, giving way to farming and agriculture. As colonies and towns appeared, professional hunters killed large amounts of game to feed the settlement populations. As a result of all the hunting and land clearing, the Eastern Wild Turkey population was reduced to near extinction with only 30,000 birds remaining by the early 1900s. Through dedicated efforts between state game departments and organizations such as the National Wild Turkey Federation to implement restocking programs, restore habitat, and encourage enforcement of game laws, today’s Eastern Wild Turkey population exceeds 7 million.

